

## Bleachers by HashtagLEH

**Series:** [Something Like a Family \[15\]](#)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Apologies, Bisexual Steve Harrington, Breaking Up & Making Up, Established Relationship, Gay Billy Hargrove, Good Friend Robin Buckley, Grinding, Groping, I'm Bad At Titles, I'm surprised too, Lesbian Robin Buckley, M/M, Making Out, Making Up, Outing, Period-Typical Homophobia, Protective Steve Harrington, Smoking, Sort of..., Steve Harrington Needs a Hug, Tommy Hagan Isn't As Big of An Asshole As We Thought, they never officially break up but it's implied

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Tommy Hagan

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Tommy Hagan & Steve Harrington

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**Summary:**

He was uncertain how to start with asking Tommy to keep what he saw between them. Once upon a time it would've been easy – he could've just blurted out whatever was on his mind and Tommy would've understood. Now though, they were on shaky enough ground as it was with it having been over a year since they'd spoken a friendly or civil word to each other. He didn't know how to broach the subject anymore.

“Jesus Christ, just say whatever the hell you tracked me down to say and get out of here,” Tommy finally said, glaring at him. “I don't want to see your face any more than I already have to.”

Steve swallowed and pulled the cigarette away from his lips, tapped the ash off the end of it as he exhaled but didn't raise it to his mouth again. "Are you going to tell anyone?"

# Bleachers

## Author's Note:

This one gets a bit sexy; for anyone uncomfortable with that stop reading when Billy says "This is too risky", and you can come back at "Between one moment and the next, everything changed".

Also for those anxious, rest assured everything turns out okay.

Also if anyone has any better ideas for a title I'm all ears. I literally spent like half an hour trying to figure something out before just slapping this one on. I'm helpless.

Billy was a difficult person. To get along with, to convince him to his side – anything, really. Steve knows this. He has known this since he first met the guy, back at that stupid Halloween party. It was then confirmed in the following several interactions between them, Billy pushing and pushing like he just wanted to piss him off. Some of that had softened as Steve had gotten to know him more – or maybe Steve just understood more that Billy was contrary because he *liked* it.

It didn't really matter. Steve had been crushing on him for – well, he couldn't pin it down exactly, when he had realized that he had a crush on Billy Hargrove. He had seen when Billy had shown up at school that first day back in October, and he had recognized that Billy was attractive. The crush had probably started around the time he had stood side by side with him in the tunnels, prepared to fight off as many demodogs as they could for the sake of the kids they were protecting.

But he knew that Billy treated him differently than he did everyone else at school – and not just because Steve was his friend. He had seen Billy get mean, had heard some of the comments he made when he got mad. He knew that to get any sort of real expression of feelings, he had to be pushed. Billy never allowed himself to be the most vulnerable person in the room.

So, he had honestly expected that it would be much the same to be in an actual relationship with him. He expected the usual push and shove he got from him whenever they had hung out before.

And it was there. Billy was still Billy, after all, and he liked to poke the bear, so to speak. But being in a relationship with him was, by and large, very *easy*.

Sure, he knew that it was still the “honeymoon period”, and that’s when *everything* was easy, because you were happier all the time and more forgiving. But still Steve enjoyed the ease he felt when he could be with Billy, alone, and just *be*. Billy was surprisingly tactile – Steve had suspected this before, when he liked to grab a blanket when they watched TV together before they started dating, but Steve hadn’t known then that Billy was holding himself back from snuggling into *Steve*. Now, he had a life-sized teddy bear when they sat together on the couch, no longer at opposite corners. And Steve was honestly *delighted*, because he liked cuddles, always had, and now he didn’t even have to *ask* because Billy was already glomping himself to his side before he could even open his mouth.

They did have their worse periods, though. Sometimes Billy would show up at Steve’s house at night like he was looking for a fight, skittering around the kitchen or the living room like a nervous cat but insistent that he just wanted to be *around* Steve, and it was enough. Steve had his own suspicions why Billy acted like he did on those nights (and sometimes days) though, so he didn’t push the matter and just chattered away at him about whatever came to mind until Billy either calmed down, fell asleep, or went back home.

Another thing that was hard but still *understandable*, considering they were in Hawkins, was that they had to keep their relationship under such tight secrecy. Sometimes Steve thought that Billy was around him *less* now that they were dating than he had ever been when they were just friends. Only Max knew that they were dating, and probably El too because she knew everything and she had her weird mind-reading powers to back her up. Oh, and Robin, but that was fine because she wasn’t straight either so there was nothing to worry about getting out there. And she had been the one to finally shove them together, so she was more than just okay with their dating; she actively supported it. Hopper and Joyce and probably even Jonathan

*suspected*, but Steve didn't think it had been confirmed to any of them yet.

Still, Steve knew that Billy got nervous with the more people who knew about them, so he had insisted that they hide it from *everyone*. And Steve got it – he really, really did – but he also didn't think that the kids would hate them or tell anyone if they found out, and he *wanted* to tell them. At least Dustin, but he also knew Dustin well enough to know that what he knew, the rest of the Party knew, so he kept silent on it.

At least he had Robin to talk to, Steve reflected a couple of times. She was snarky and abrasive and yet their friendship had grown after Steve and Billy had gotten together and she had gotten over her “I told you so's”, whether they were comments or just smirks in their direction when she saw them do something that she called “particularly gay”. Steve liked hanging out with her, even without Billy there, and wondered why he hadn't made friends with her *years* ago, because yeah she was a band geek and she blended into the background more at school, but she was legitimately *cool*.

(Not that he would ever tell her that. It would go to her head. She probably knew anyway.)

Valentine's Day came in a flurry of red and pink, and Steve hadn't ever really cared for the holiday before. When he'd been dating Nancy he had brought her roses to school and taken her out for dinner, but otherwise the holiday had been something to get through, where he would find some girl to have a fling with and shower with attention on the day. It hadn't ever felt *real*, though.

And it wasn't that it felt more real *now*, but the day did make him very aware of the couples around him. It made him aware of the fact that everyone thought he was single, for the first time since fifth grade or something, but he couldn't exactly correct everyone that *no*, Billy Hargrove was *his* and he was quite happily in a relationship, thank you. He wanted to be as open about it as everyone else was, wanted to kiss Billy in the hallways between classes and tell the waitress at the diner that they were there on a *date*, not just as friends.

He wasn't stupid, though. He knew he could never do something like that – not in small town Hawkins, and not with someone like Neil Hargrove watching his son for just such a thing. He wasn't even tempted to – he was just wistful, when he looked around at everyone else on a day meant for lovers, and couldn't be accepted within them too. He wanted to spoil Billy and have everyone know the reason why.

They *did* end up spending a nice night together on Valentine's Day, and it didn't feel any more or less special than any other night, because they had already enjoyed just the simple act of spending time together even before that night in the rain when they'd finally gotten together. They had even explored ways of getting each other off before, so the time spent in bed wasn't particularly extravagant, either. (Also, neither of them wanted to have the pressure of having actual sex with the other just for some arbitrary holiday, so they had just treated the day as any other. They would go all the way whenever they decided they were ready, but being only two weeks into a relationship they knew they weren't.)

And Steve didn't think too much of his wishful thinking, because that's exactly what it was, and he knew it. He took every day as it came, went to school, spent time with Billy after, babysat the kids with or without his boyfriend (and it still made his heart fluttery to think of that term), rinse and repeat.

He enjoyed his last period every day with Billy. It was finally *actually* basketball season, so that was what they practiced for most days, since there wasn't the funding to have practice after school. Whether he was on the opposing team or the same team, he liked the competitive gleam Billy got when he got on the court. He liked when they pressed together under the guise of blocking, and he liked that since they had no classes afterwards, they could do whatever they wanted after, without any sort of rush.

It was the beginning of March when Billy and Steve played one on one on the court as the other boys went to the locker rooms to shower. Neither of them had really planned it that way, but they had been riling each other up and egging each other on for the whole last hour, and they were still competitive despite the fact that they were dating, so they had played an extra game.

By the time they made it to the locker rooms, everyone had already cleared out and Coach was just leaving, reminding them to lock up when they left. (At first, the guy hadn't trusted either of them alone together, probably thought they were going to get into a fight if left to their own devices with no intermediary. Steve supposed from an outsider's perspective, that made sense, because the first week of knowing each other had been full of obvious tension, with Billy shoving him and sneering and being a general asshole, and *now* Steve could tease him about how he'd been pulling his pigtails, so to speak, but at the time he'd disliked him right back and Coach had certainly seen that. Now that it was obvious that their teasing was more friendly, Coach didn't mind so much leaving them alone or pairing them together in practice.)

And Steve *really* hadn't planned for it, but when he and Billy were in the communal showers together, he glanced over at the other boy and saw all that beautiful skin on display, and his mouth watered and he *wanted*.

"Steve," Billy hissed quietly, cutting off his comment about dinner or something (Steve couldn't remember) when Steve attached himself to his back, wrapping his arms around his waist and kissing his shoulder.

"Billy," Steve returned, lips curving against Billy's shoulder.

"We're in *public*," Billy chastised, though he didn't make any attempt at breaking Steve's hold.

If Billy really didn't want to do anything, then Steve would back off immediately, but his lack of protest had him leaning back a little and saying instead, "Really? Because...I don't see anyone else here."

Billy huffed and pulled away a little, but only so that he could turn around to face Steve. His eyes were amused through the wariness at being in the locker rooms, but he slung his arms loosely around Steve's waist so he couldn't be too wary, really.

Steve beamed at him. "Hi," he said, like a complete dork, but at least he was self-aware so whatever. "You're looking pretty hot today. Had a hard time keeping my hands to myself."

“Clearly,” Billy said dryly. He glanced around, despite the fact that he knew they were alone, before he leaned in and pressed a lingering kiss to Steve’s lips. Steve eagerly returned the kiss, pulling Billy closer until they were pressed flush against each other, slickened by the water still beating down from the shower head.

“This is too risky,” Billy said, pulling back with great reluctance. “Let’s just get dressed and go back to your house, pick up where we left off there.”

Steve pouted. “Classes are over, everyone is gone,” he pointed out. And then, “But I see your point. Alright, let’s go.” He pulled away suddenly, going back to his shower head to rinse off, sure to have just a *little* sway to his hips as he turned his back on the other boy. He knew exactly how much Billy liked his ass.

A moment later, Billy’s hands were grabbing around his waist again, halting his progress and pulling him against him, so that he was pressed against Steve’s back.

“Fuckin’ *tease*,” Billy growled, and Steve’s lips curved in a victorious smile even as he turned around and met Billy’s crash of lips against his own. He moved his hands to wrap around Billy’s hips, using the hold to propel Billy backward, toward the tiled wall of the showers. Billy went willingly, hands going to Steve’s wet hair, a breath escaping him as his back hit against the wall before their lips met harshly again. Steve had grown a great appreciation for what a good kisser Billy was.

It took no time at all before he was completely hard and grinding against Billy, coaxing the other boy into matching his movements. He’d discovered in their experimenting before that Billy liked to be guided in anything more than kissing – not because he was reluctant, but because he liked it when Steve made the decisions in this area.

Their breathing was heavy between them, just barely quieter than the splatter of water against the tile ground behind them from the still running shower heads. Billy’s hands were on Steve’s ass, grabbing and squeezing in a way that made Steve groan as he moved his lips over the line of the other boy’s jaw. One hand went to Billy’s thigh while the other went to his hair, tugging it to move his head to the

side so he had easier access to his ear.

After briefly nibbling the lobe, he panted hotly into his ear, “I wanna blow you.”

Billy’s breath caught, and his dick kicked against Steve’s thigh before he was nodding wordlessly, rapidly as his breathing picked up again in anticipation. His head fell back against the tiled wall, and Steve spent some time kissing and sucking against Billy’s collarbone, careful not to leave marks but knowing where Billy’s weak spots were and wanting to lave them with attention before getting to the main event.

Between one moment and the next, everything changed.

Steve’s first clue was the sudden stiffness in Billy’s entire body; his second was Billy rapidly going soft between them. By the time Billy was shoving a hand against Steve’s chest to force him away, Steve was already backing off in concern.

He thought he might have triggered something at first, something to make Billy against any sort of sex for the moment, and he opened his mouth to ask what was wrong, how he could help – before he noticed that Billy wasn’t even looking at him, but at something over Steve’s shoulder, behind him. His expression was terrified.

Steve spun around, not sure what to expect, and still shocked to see a head of dark hair making its retreat, clearly having caught them in their compromising position. A very *familiar* head of dark hair.

“He can’t – he’s going to...” Billy stammered behind him, and Steve *knew* him, and he knew that Billy was about to switch over to lashing out, whether to him or someone else, so he spun back around and pressed a hand to Billy’s chest.

“*Stay here,*” Steve said quickly, and very firmly. He didn’t wait for a response, didn’t wait for Billy’s eyes to meet his or for him to agree because they didn’t have time for that, only bolted out of the showers after his former best friend.

“Tommy!” he called, right before he heard the slam of the locker

room door closing. He wondered how they hadn't heard the boy come in the first time, figured they must have been too caught up in each other to pay attention to their surroundings. He ignored those thoughts for now though, grabbing his sweaty gym shirt and shorts, tugging them on over wet skin because he didn't have time for anything else, just ran after him as fast as he could.

He didn't want to think that Tommy would tell everyone what he'd seen, that he would out them to the whole town, because Tommy had been his best friend, once. But that was the problem – their friendship was in the past, and Steve couldn't say with certainty that he wouldn't use this to get back at him. That was even *if* he wasn't completely disgusted by two guys together. Steve well remembered some of Tommy's comments about other classmates and the people Steve now considered friends, how he would use "freak" and "queer" in the same breath, like they were synonymous with *disgusting*. Steve had made the same comments and comparisons though, and look how that had turned out.

But he needed to make sure that Tommy wasn't going to out them. Steve thought that he would be okay, probably – he could take all his money and get out of Hawkins if things got too rough. But Billy didn't have that security, and yes Steve would of course protect him in any way that he could, but what about the interim? What would happen if his dad found out? Steve had already picked up some of how Neil Hargrove treated his son, and none of it was pretty. He didn't want to risk Billy's safety. He didn't want to risk Billy's reputation either, because that was what kept Billy afloat in this small town. For Steve, there was no more reputation to be lost.

So he ran after Tommy, because he needed to keep Billy safe. He didn't care what he had to do or say to his former friend to make sure this was kept a secret, but he was ready to do it.

But when he got outside, to the parking lot outside the gym, he was just in time to see Tommy close the door to his car as he got inside.

"Tommy, wait!" Steve called frantically, letting the gym door slam behind him as he ran on bare feet across the sidewalk.

But Tommy ignored him, acted like Steve wasn't even there, and in

moments the car was pulling out of the school parking lot and disappearing down the street.

When Steve got back to the locker room, Billy was gone, too.

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“You’re a dingus,” Robin told him the next day when he shared with her what had happened in hushed whispers during History. They were at the back of the class, paired off to fill out a worksheet, and no one even glanced their way as Steve quietly freaked out to her about the events of the last several hours.

“More than that, you’re an *idiot*,” Robin went on, pressing her pencil hard into the paper as she circled an answer on the worksheet. Steve didn’t know or care whether it was the right answer, and he didn’t think she did either – they just needed to get it done. “Why would you do something like *that* in public? In *school*?”

“Classes were over,” Steve said weakly, but he knew that it was a poor excuse, and chewed his lip anxiously. “Look, what’s happened has happened, I just don’t know how the fuck to *deal* with it. Billy didn’t even *look* at me today – just went to class before I could get out of my car. And it’s not like I can chase after him, because that would cause a scene and that’s the *last* thing we need. And Tommy...” He glanced in the direction of the seat Tommy normally sat in during first period; it was empty. “I don’t know what he’ll do, but Billy can’t handle being – being *outed* like that. But Tommy didn’t answer his door yesterday either, and I don’t know what to do!”

“Okay, calm down, dingus,” Robin ordered, grabbing his hand to get his attention. “If the problem with Billy Goat continues, I can smack some sense into him during third period. He *does* care about you – he can’t ignore you forever. Now, Hagan?” She shook her head, and released his hand. “I don’t know how to help you with that – you know the asshole better than I do. Is talking to him going to help any, or make it worse?”

“I don’t *know*,” Steve said desperately. “Fuck, Robin, it’s been over a year since we were even on speaking terms – he *hates* me now.”

Robin snorted, but didn't elaborate on why, saying instead, "You need to figure out what you're going to do then, and *soon*, because if he decides to tell people it won't take long before it gets to everyone in Hawkins."

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Billy didn't look at him at all during second period, which both worried Steve and made his heart clench with pain. It was even worse than that first week of knowing the boy, when he'd been antagonizing him, because at least then he'd *acknowledged* him. Now it was like he was just another classmate.

It felt a lot like breaking up, and he didn't know how to take that. They'd been dating for barely a month – they'd been so *happy*. Or Steve thought they had. Maybe he was just naïve. Maybe he was pretending for long enough that he'd fooled even himself.

*Bullshit*, a voice that sounded eerily like Nancy whispered to him, taunting. *You're just bullshit. That's why no one wants to date you. Why no one wants to be around you. You can't be loved.*

He shoved the voice away, despite the part of him that believed it. The part of him that would probably always believe it, because he had patterns growing up to fall back on as evidence.

He kicked himself repeatedly for how he'd pushed Billy in the showers. He remembered him saying that it was a bad idea, that they were in public – he'd even suggested going back to Steve's house right after. It wouldn't have taken *that* long to relocate. Why couldn't Steve have been smart, in just this one, incredibly important thing?

*Stupid.*

He kept looking for Tommy, wondering if things would happen slowly or suddenly, the stares and whispers turning to jeers and hate. But it looked like Tommy wasn't at school at all that day, and Steve didn't want to think it was because of what had happened the day before but what else could it be?

Billy didn't appear at lunch either, and when Steve looked in the

parking lot he saw that the Camaro was gone. He wasn't in P.E. either, which meant he'd probably ditched the last half of the day to avoid any more people, including Steve. He sucked his bottom lip between his teeth and reminded himself that it would be very stupid to call the Hargrove residence, if the hints he had about how Billy's dad acted were any indication. He couldn't drive by, either, but –

Wait, he realized. Maybe Max could help. He was pretty sure that even with Billy ditching school he would have to come back for his sister, because they lived pretty far away for her to just skateboard home. But maybe he could catch her before Billy showed up.

He left P.E. a few minutes early, claiming a headache, and not bothering to shower but just pulling his jeans and sweater back on without regard to the light sheen of sweat sticking to his skin.

He pulled up to the middle school just as they were getting out, and he parked in one of the front spaces, hopping out to lean against the driver's side door as he waited for the kids to get there.

They came in their usual crowd, Max talking with Lucas off to the side and Dustin saying something to Will and Mike as he used large hand gestures to illustrate whatever point he was making. Dustin looked up and waved cheerfully when he saw Steve, and kept talking with his friends because he knew by now that he didn't have to rush when Steve came to pick him up. Lucas gave Max a kiss on the cheek before he went to his mom's car waiting a little down the parking lot a ways, and Steve took the opportunity to call Max over, even as he glanced around to see if Billy was there yet.

"What's up?" she asked him as she approached, skateboard held under one arm.

"Um...kind of awkward request," Steve said, reaching up to rub a hand over the back of his neck. "It's about Billy."

Max glanced around quickly, making sure no one was paying attention to them, including the boys sequestered off on the other side of the car, before she looked back at him and whispered, "Look, I don't want to get in the middle of your guys' relationship, so if that's what you're asking..."

“No!” Steve said hastily. “That’s not – I mean, not exactly.” Then he paused. “Weren’t *you* the one pushing Billy to tell me how he felt way back in November? How is that *not* getting involved?”

“Okay, that was different,” Max protested, hitching her backpack higher on her shoulder as a light flush stole over her cheeks. “You guys are *actually* together now, so nothing is hypothetical anymore. What you guys get up to is your own business.”

“Okay, whatever,” Steve dismissed, because he didn’t have time to argue semantics, and she did kind of have a point. “I just – I need help, and Billy’s not talking to me, and I don’t know if it’s because he wants to be *over* or if he’s just taking time to think or something...”

“Wait, wait,” Max held up a hand, squinting up at him. “He wants to break up?”

“I don’t *know*,” Steve said, running a hand over his hair. “He – someone caught us, yesterday. I haven’t been able to talk to him since then, so I don’t know what to *do*...”

“Someone *caught* you?” Max’s eyes widened with dread. Then, “He was really quiet last night, but I just figured Ne...” She snapped her mouth shut with a click, but Steve could guess what she had been about to say.

“I haven’t been able to talk with the one who caught us, either,” Steve further explained. “But if you could talk to Billy, have him call me if he can or come by my place or something so we can talk, that’s all I need; I can take care of the rest.”

They were startled by the sound of the honk of a familiar horn behind them, and both of them snapped their heads up to see Billy just rolling to a stop in his Camaro. The passenger side window was already rolled down, and Steve’s heart kicked at the sight of his (ex?) boyfriend sitting in the driver’s seat with his old leather jacket and aviators firmly planted over his eyes.

“Let’s go, Max!” Billy hollered out the window, drawing curious looks from other students and parents in the lot. “Haven’t got all day!”

Max looked back at Steve. "I'll talk to him," she promised. "I know he cares about you – he's just being stupid, not talking to you because of this."

"You don't have to get in the middle – I just need to have a chance to actually talk with him," Steve said quickly.

The horn blared again, longer this time and more obviously angry, drawing judgmental stares from the people milling about.

Billy, as usual, didn't care about the stares, and just yelled out the window, "Swear to God, Maxine! I will *leave* you here!"

Max didn't look intimidated in the slightest, just paused to flip Billy off before giving Steve a commiserating look. "I think talking to him would be to everyone's benefit," she said wryly, beginning to walk toward the Camaro so Billy could see she was taking him seriously. "Can't promise he'll talk to you *tonight*, but I'll do my best."

Steve nodded, watching as Max got into the muscle car, as Billy didn't even look his direction as he floored it out of the parking lot with a loud roar of his engine. With a small sigh to himself, he turned back to his own car, seeing that Dustin had already gotten inside, and Will and Mike were getting in Jonathan's car a few spots down. He slid into the driver's seat and turned the key in the ignition.

"What were you talking with Max about?" Dustin asked him curiously as he backed out of the spot, careful of the middle schoolers who walked behind him.

Steve blew out a breath and looked at the road intently, like it needed all of his focus to drive. "Nothing important."

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To his great disappointment, Steve didn't hear from Billy all that night. He even slept on the couch in the front room, right next to the phone in case he called and close enough to the front door that he would hear if he knocked or rang on the doorbell. He did neither.

He hadn't had any luck at the Hagans' house, either. Mrs. Hagan was as pleased to see him as she always was, apparently not knowing that

he and Tommy weren't friends anymore as she cheerfully and regretfully told him that Tommy wasn't home, that he was spending the night at Carol's house. She obviously knew he and Tommy weren't as close as they had once been, but didn't know the extent of how things had gone a little over a year before, if the way she sent him back home with several containers of leftovers was any indication.

She clearly hadn't been told that her son's one-time best friend had been making out with another boy in the school showers either – Steve was positive she would've mentioned it in the twenty minutes she chattered to him while boxing up the food.

Steve briefly considered going to Carol's house, because he was certain that Tommy would tell his longtime girlfriend that Steve was a fag now, but on the off chance that this was just a normal occurrence of them spending the night together, he didn't want to have the talk he needed with Carol right there to judge him, too.

He just hoped that Tommy wasn't telling Carol so that Carol would be the one to spread the news about him – she had always been good at spreading gossip and rumors, let alone things that were *true*.

So, all told, the night was not a good one. He was waiting for Billy – any sign from him that they could talk, that they could figure this out so that Steve didn't have to feel so *alone*, not only in this big empty house but in the uncertainty of when and how Tommy would out them to the world. Even the relatively small world that was Hawkins. The waiting and wondering didn't allow for any kind of sleep, which he was used to with the nightmares of the Upside Down, but somehow this was worse, because now he was *truly* alone.

He got to school early the next day, certain that he wasn't going to sleep anymore and not seeing any point in hanging around the house that felt like a tomb. He sat in his car, listening to his music playing quietly through the speakers and idly smoking a cigarette to keep his hands busy. He continued to sit there as people began to trickle into the parking lot, waving absently as Nancy noticed him when she and Jonathan arrived. He saw Lucas get dropped off with Dustin right behind him – his mom had had the time and desire to drive him that day, so Steve hadn't needed to pick him up.

The Camaro didn't show up at all, and Steve felt his heart begin to sink deeper in his chest as it began to hit him that Billy wasn't going to show up. He didn't even drop Max off, and Steve didn't know how to take that, that both of them were missing.

He swallowed around a tight throat as the late bell rang and the lot emptied, everyone going inside for class. He scolded himself for it, because it had barely been a day, and he didn't *know* that Billy wanted nothing to do with him anymore. They needed to talk before anything was set in stone.

But still it felt like the beginning of the end, and he sat in his car all through first period, smoking through his box of cigarettes and not caring that he was going to smell like an ashtray for the rest of the day. He tried not to think about how at this point, his car smelled almost like the Camaro did, smoke and sex and cologne ingrained in the leather from all the time he and Billy had spent in it. He tried not to be simultaneously comforted and hurt by the thought.

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He made it to second period, and only because he knew that Robin would worry if he didn't make an appearance after yesterday. Billy still wasn't there, and Steve tried not to care as he stared unseeingly at the words Mrs. Norman wrote on the board. He didn't care when he was called out for his inattention, when he got the answers wrong to the pointed questions the teacher asked him in front of the class, when he couldn't muster up a falsely confident smile and a joke to get everyone else to laugh *with* him rather than *at* him and the teacher to shake their head in resignation before moving on.

Robin shot him concerned looks throughout class, but he didn't want to talk to her – he wanted to talk to *Billy* but Billy wasn't *letting* him.

He saw Tommy in the hallway during passing period between second and third hour. Tommy saw him, too; they made eye contact from a distance before Tommy wrinkled his nose and turned to say something to Carol that made her laugh and shove him a little. Steve wasn't sure how to interpret that, but he obviously couldn't talk to him with everyone around and eager to watch a show between the former King and his former best friend. He resolved to grab Tommy

at lunch; they could go outside and talk without the audience, and Steve was ready to *beg* him not to say anything, not caring what it would take to get Tommy to agree just so long as he could keep Billy safe.

His plans were derailed just a couple of minutes into lunch though, and it was from an unexpected source.

He was sitting with Nancy and Jonathan, poking at his food and waiting for Tommy to show up – he always showed up to lunch a few minutes late, so this wasn't unexpected – and fending off the concerned questions from the two across from him. He looked up when a tray clattered down in the seat directly across from him, ready to tell whoever it was to get lost, because he knew Robin had extra band practice that lunch break so whoever it was was *unwelcome* – and then he saw who it was and his words died in his throat.

“Afternoon, kids,” Billy greeted, nodding his head at them as he took a bite out of his apple with a loud crunch. Then Billy looked up at Steve, and Steve was caught by the familiar brightness of the eyes that he so loved, even as the blond said casually, “Saved the pudding for you, pretty boy.”

The fingers of Billy's hand not holding the apple nudged the pudding cup toward Steve like an offering, keeping eye contact with Steve as he did. Those eyes were sorrowful, apologetic and remorseful, and Steve swallowed because they still needed to talk – hadn't talked since they were in the showers – but he thought he could pick up enough to know that Billy wasn't running anymore, and more than that that he was *telling* Steve he wasn't running anymore. His hope fluttered like a baby bird, not sure whether he would fly or fall, and he hoped he wasn't just setting himself up for more pain when he reached out and accepted the pudding cup – accepted Billy's offering and his wordless apology.

“Thanks,” Steve said casually, because they were still in public, and he ignored the way his voice cracked down the middle of the word the same way he ignored the desire to kiss Billy with relief.

Billy looked relieved too, and Steve felt his ankle hook around his

and stay there even as he turned to say something to Jonathan beside him.

Steve felt his heart rate finally slow from the panic that had been carrying him through the past couple of days, and opened the pudding cup and took a bite, pressing his ankle harder against Billy's to soak up as much secret affection as he could. He made a mental note to get Max something as thanks, because he was certain she was responsible for Billy's newfound calm toward all this.

Talking with Tommy didn't seem so daunting anymore, he realized. Maybe it was because now he knew he wasn't alone.

It was a heady thought.

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Billy had to take Max home, and then they were meeting back at Steve's house. Billy offered to take Dustin home, because Steve was going to try to catch Tommy after school again and that would give them more time; Steve was grateful for the offer and agreed immediately. Robin had told him that she'd heard Carol had to stay for an after-school detention, so Steve knew that Tommy would be hanging around waiting for his girlfriend for an hour after school.

He found him, as expected, under the bleachers at the back of the school. There was no baseball practice that day – Steve didn't care to know why – so the field was empty except for them.

Tommy looked up as Steve approached, hand falling to his side to hide the cigarette he was smoking as though he couldn't smell it, before he scowled upon seeing Steve instead of a teacher.

"The hell do you want, Harrington?" Tommy bit out, raising the cigarette to his lips again and taking an angry puff, looking away and out toward the forest behind the school rather than at Steve.

Steve shrugged and leaned against the beam across from the auburn-haired boy, keeping his hands in his pockets to fend off the slight chill of early Spring. "A smoke wouldn't go amiss," he said carelessly, like it didn't matter either way.

Which – it didn't, but he was a little surprised when Tommy fished into his pocket, leaving his cigarette dangling from his lips, and drew one out of the red and white box, holding it out between two fingers for Steve to take.

"Get your own light though," Tommy grumbled, shoving the box back into his pocket, and Steve's lips twitched unwillingly at the familiar pettiness in the shorter boy. He didn't say anything though, grabbing his own lighter from his pocket and lighting up. He didn't *really* want a smoke – not only had he had enough that morning, but it had become something of a ritual between him and Billy instead that Steve didn't really feel the desire outside of that – but it gave him something to do, and gave him some sort of connection with his former best friend as they stood there.

He was uncertain how to start with asking Tommy to keep what he saw between them. Once upon a time it would've been easy – he could've just blurted out whatever was on his mind and Tommy would've understood. Now though, they were on shaky enough ground as it was with it having been over a year since they'd spoken a friendly or civil word to each other. He didn't know how to broach the subject anymore.

"Jesus Christ, just say whatever the hell you tracked me down to say and get out of here," Tommy finally said, glaring at him. "I don't want to see your face any more than I already have to."

Steve swallowed and pulled the cigarette away from his lips, tapped the ash off the end of it as he exhaled but didn't raise it to his mouth again. "Are you going to tell anyone?" he blurted, and then winced mentally because there was certainly a better way to bring up the subject. He didn't know what it might have been, but he was certain that that wasn't it.

Tommy raised an eyebrow, staring at him flatly. "Tell anyone *what*?" he prodded, his eyes intent.

Steve's nostrils flared, because he *knew* Tommy knew what he was talking about. He hadn't taken Tommy to be so cruel as to make him spell it out, though he supposed he should have. Steve himself had been capable of unaccountable cruelty, not so long ago.

“About – what you saw,” Steve stammered, reminding himself that he was doing this for Billy. For both of them – for their safety. A little humiliation in front of someone who had already seen him at his lowest was nothing compared to the humiliation and so much *worse* if the whole town found out a couple of queers lived there.

“Are you going to tell anyone we’re queer?” Steve asked straightforward, firming his voice along with his resolve, looking Tommy in the eyes.

Those eyes were disgusted as he looked at him, and Steve’s heart began to sink with dread, certain that the next words that came out of Tommy’s mouth would be scornful confirmation.

“You think I’m an idiot?” Tommy demanded, tossing his cigarette to the ground and not bothering to stamp it out as it landed in the dirt. “I’ve lived here just as long as you have – I know *exactly* how Hawkins would react to that. And you might be the asshole who decided you were too good for us, but *I* never forgot our friendship.” Shaking his head disgustedly to himself, he brushed past Steve to go back to the school, despite the fact that detention wasn’t over yet.

“I never decided I was too good for you,” Steve defended, apparently unable to help himself even as Tommy walked away. “You and Carol were the ones being assholes...”

“*No*, Steve!” Tommy whirled on him with a snarl, shoving him in the chest hard enough that he fell back a couple of steps. “We were *all* assholes, that was the *point*! And we had been *best* fucking friends since *preschool*, and you dropped me for some prissy, stuck-up *bitch*.”

“*Don’t* call Nancy that...” Steve started heatedly, but Tommy interrupted him with another shove to his chest. This time the cigarette fell from loose fingers, half smoked and forgotten in the midst of their argument.

“*Or what*, King Steve?” he demanded, face twisted in a sneer. “You know, if you wanted to hang around the dweebs and the middle schoolers, what-the-fuck-ever. But you treated *one* argument like it was the end of the *fucking* world, and *you* dropped us like we meant *nothing*. I didn’t stop being friends with *you*. *You* stopped being

friends with *me*.”

“You *literally* threatened to beat my face in...”

“After *you* already wanted to start a fight!” Tommy’s hands clenched into fists, but rather than the punch Steve half-expected him to throw, he furiously kicked the beam of the bleachers instead. “Do you even remember after that weekend, I brought you a Coke at lunch? And *you* moved to a different table. So don’t try and pin this shit on *me*, Harrington. You’re the one who practically *demand*ed this distance.”

Steve did remember that, vaguely. He’d thought that Tommy was reminding him of the bruises on his face, because on Saturday Tommy had gotten him a cold soda as a makeshift ice pack for his bruises. He’d forgotten, then, that their way of apologizing was an exchange of food of some sort.

Tommy looked tired suddenly, and hurt but like he was trying desperately to hide it to save face. “And now, you think I want you *dead*, apparently. I don’t know what the hell I did to make you hate me so much after so long, but I’m not dealing with it. That’s your own shit.”

The boy turned to walk away again, but Steve reached out suddenly to grab him by the arm, because he was having a revelatory experience, similar to the one he’d had that had destroyed their friendship. He hadn’t realized that that had been so one-sided, that Tommy still cared about him.

“Fucking get off me, man,” Tommy complained immediately, shaking his arm and looking a second from punching him in the face to get free.

“I’m sorry,” Steve blurted, cutting him off. Tommy looked startled, because the apology was *verbal*, which they’d never done before but Steve was thinking he should change that, if everything that had happened between them had been the result of such an unspoken rule.

“I didn’t realize – but that’s no excuse,” Steve shook his head and

released Tommy's arm now that he wasn't fighting to get away. "I was – there was a lot of shit that happened that weekend, and I was trying to be a better person and I thought you'd try and...stop that, I dunno. I should've trusted you more."

Tommy looked uncomfortable now. "Shit, Steve, stop it with the mushiness..."

"No," Steve retorted without pause. "It's been over a year, so I get it if you want to just keep things how they've been, but you have to know that I *am* sorry. I was a dick and you didn't deserve that."

"No, we didn't," Tommy said haughtily, and then hesitated before saying, "I'm not – *opposed* – to hanging out with you again."

Steve's relieved smile practically split his face. "Really? You don't think me and Billy are – gross?"

Tommy snorted. "No, I think it's disgusting," he disagreed. "But I also think oral is disgusting and I don't judge anyone for liking *that*. And Carol doesn't care either way – it's not *her* relationship."

Steve had honestly expected a response a lot worse than that, so he just considered himself lucky that at least Tommy was being honest with him. It made him trust further that Tommy wasn't just going to use this to turn around and stab him in the back when he least expected it. Bringing up Carol's reaction was just another way he quietly reassured Steve that she wasn't going to tell anyone either, but also that he wasn't keeping secrets from his girlfriend. He was glad Tommy was so quick to forgive, too – it was something Steve had forgotten about his friend in their time apart. He already knew Tommy wasn't going to maliciously hold this against him going forward, and he was hit with a sudden burst of renewed affection for the other boy.

"Do you want to do something this weekend?" Steve asked him impulsively. "Go to the movies, maybe?"

Tommy squinted at him. "This isn't a come-on, is it?" he asked warily.

“No, *Jesus*, Tom,” Steve sighed. Tommy was still Tommy, of course. “Just cause I’m queer doesn’t mean I’m queer for *you*. Just – we used to go to the movies all the time. You can bring Carol – it’ll be like old times.”

Tommy relaxed a little. His fingers were picking at the edge of his jacket. “Sure,” he accepted. “Haven’t been in a while. Heard there’s supposed to be a couple of good ones down at The Hawk. Something about a club for breakfast? And there’s one with Harrison Ford.”

“Hey, he’s in those Star Wars movies, right?” Steve remembered. He was *pretty* sure he recognized the name, but he’d never been great at remembering anything about movies.

Tommy sighed. “Yes, he’s one of the main characters. He’s also Indiana Jones.”

Steve looked at him blankly. “Who?”

“Jesus Christ,” Tommy muttered, though there was an undercurrent of bewildered affection there, like there always was when Tommy marveled at Steve being dumb. Steve wondered why Tommy was still surprised when he said or did dumb shit, but whatever.

A look of hesitation crossed Tommy’s face, and Steve braced himself for...something. He wasn’t sure what. He didn’t know what to expect from him at this point – it felt like he’d forgotten all his tells, everything that Steve knew about him that made up who he was and how he reacted to things.

But then Tommy seemed to come to some decision, and he blew out a sigh as he said almost grudgingly, “You can bring Hargrove along too, if you want.”

Steve blinked, and then his eyes widened as the words and intent behind them processed. “Really?” Tommy wasn’t against Billy and Steve’s relationship, he’d said so himself, but still Steve wouldn’t have expected this level of *support* from the other boy.

“Yeah,” Tommy said, looking like it pained him to say but resolve firming that he wasn’t going to back out of his offer. “It can be like...

a double date.”

Steve’s expression slowly shifted, smile spreading over his face. This was far from the reaction he had expected from Tommy a couple of days before, or even ten minutes ago, but he was glad that things had gone even better than he had dared to hope for.

“Yeah,” Steve murmured, still smiling, “I’d like that.”

### Author's Note:

My original plans for this didn't have Billy freaking out and going silent on Steve like this - instead he was going to get angry and go to fight Tommy and Steve would break it up and have the talk with him. I liked this plan better - although I didn't know what was going to happen even *as* I wrote it lol.

Hope you liked it! You can thank smashmouth-hargrove and draculcid on Tumblr for convincing me (rather easily, in retrospect) of Tommy's sheer *potential*. When I started the series I didn't care for him, because I don't see a lot of fics with him in a good light so I just hadn't ever considered it, and then I started seeing Stommy and Keg Boys tags on Tumblr and although that's not where I'm going with this series I did see a way to make him friends with Steve again and so I TOOK IT. That is 100% of the reason this installment exists; it was not in the original outline but I needed more at least *decent* friend Tommy. One day I will write more of him, but now I just plan for him to pop up occasionally in this 'verse.

Also I wanted to make Tommy cool with it and maybe even bi himself, but then I figured I couldn't have *too* many people so openly okay with everything LGBT in a fic that takes place in the eighties. We can just imagine that this is Tommy's initial reaction (because he hasn't had to think about anyone he knows or *likes* being in that community at

this point) but later on down the road he's gotten used to it enough and *seen* it enough that he'll fight anyone who derides them for it and he becomes a big Pride supporter thanks to being best friends with Steve. At least, that's what *I* imagine. We're not gonna see that in the actual series, but in my head he does get better. Just see this smidgen of homophobia now as the stupidity of Midwestern teenagers in the eighties.

ALSO also. I don't plan to write the discussion between Steve and Billy where they talk about Billy running off and going silent, mostly because it's already pretty well implied *why* he did it already. A lot of stuff goes on behind the scenes that we don't see, and I may casually mention it or hint at it later, but these kinds of talks are done so often by other people that it would just be a reworded repeat at this point. I'm sure you guys have read the fics, so just imagine that for Billy and Steve. I personally just don't have any interest in writing that.

Make no mistake, however. Their relationship is still progressing very healthily and very real, despite the fact that we don't see every facet of it. I also will never write an actual sex scene between them, just because that's not really my thing, but we can assume that's progressing naturally in the background as well and I may occasionally refer to it as it comes up in other topics (like it did in this one).

Anyway. This is becoming a *very* long end note, so I'll leave it here haha. I hope y'all liked it - I love the encouragement! Thanks for reading! <3